



THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

INTRODUCTION

When we presented our children for Baptism we said ‘yes!’ to God and to Catholic faith for them. Now as we approach the other Sacraments of Initiation we commit again to that journey – for both them and ourselves. Our children are now at an age when they can begin to understand for themselves what it means to say ‘yes!’ to God and to Catholic faith celebrated in our Church.


What we are doing is drawing our children further into the sacramental life of the church.

Sacraments are rituals which celebrate and deepen our trust in God’s love. They celebrate and deepen our relationship with Jesus and our experience of the Holy Spirit. These realities are chiefly nurtured at home, through our children’s experiences of family love and trust.

This is also a great opportunity for us to develop our own adult understanding and appreciation of the Sacraments.

Parents sometimes ask if their children are ready to receive these Sacraments. Maybe better questions are, ‘Am I ready to walk this journey with my child? Am I ready to explore my faith a little more with my child?’ Our children are ready when we are ready to guide them. Don’t expect a great deal of understanding—this is a faith experience. Faith in God is never complete—it needs continuous nurturing. Understanding gradually grows in all of us.

The ‘stuff’ of the sacraments is already part of how we parent our children every day. When we encourage them to make good choices; talk about sorrow and forgiveness; when we support their friendships; celebrate their giftedness. When they hear us apologising and forgiving; offering hospitality; caring for others; donating to charities; etc., they are experiencing the very things that we bring to God and celebrate in the Sacraments. It is already part of their lives and ours. This is where their understanding will start.



Prepare yourself ahead of the upcoming sessions by starting from your own experience. Ask yourself,

**How ready was I when I had my child baptised?
What did it mean to me at the time?**

What is Baptism? What does it mean to me now?

What are the implications of my own Baptism?

...and my child's?





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A. SETTING OUT ON THE JOURNEY

As disciples of Jesus we do not set out alone.


Sacrament – a community project...

Have you ever found yourself in a quiet moment imagining God present in the world around you? Recognising God like that is the very heart of the idea of 'sacrament'. In others and in creation, in enjoyment and in sadness. God is here with us – with you, with me. Sacrament is an everyday thing, God is always with us! But there are special times too that we believe deserve special attention – these are the seven Sacraments of the Church.

All journeys have a beginning! For Catholics, our beginning is Baptism into the Christian community. The first Sacrament of initiation (along with Confirmation and Eucharist), Baptism begins the process of becoming full members of the Catholic Christian faith community. It is through our Baptism that we accept God's call to participate in the work of the church – i.e. to be the presence of Jesus in the world. Our job then is to live the Jesus story (of love, hope, joy, justice, peace, forgiveness, and all things good!) and to spread that story to those around us. Doing this with the support of our Catholic community we preach the gospel always – and when necessary, use words.

Pentecost – the arrival of the Spirit of God...

Once Jesus ascended to God, his followers (disciples) gathered regularly to support one another, to share the 'Jesus story', to pray and to get organised to help the poor and needy around them. They wanted to keep the memory of Jesus alive. After some weeks, they were gathered together for the Jewish feast of Pentecost (first fruits). That day something extraordinary took place! The New Testament book, The Acts of the Apostles, says that they heard



what sounded like a mighty wind and saw what looked like tongues of fire resting on the head of each person (Acts 2). It was this experience that helped them to make sense of all that they had been thinking and feeling since Jesus left. They came to know and understand the presence of the Spirit in such a powerful way that they wanted to go out and talk about all that Jesus had said and done while he was with them. Where they had been frightened and fearful, now they became witnesses to the good news with a newfound, Spirit gifted, courage and confidence.

Confirmation – the anointing of the Holy Spirit...

Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing, Marriage and Ordination – these are the Sacraments, the highpoints of the Catholic Christian life – seven specifically recognised ‘God-presences’ in our lives. Each of these is a special way that God loves us and calls us – a free and undeserved gift. In Confirmation the gift of God’s love is all about strengthening and deepening our belonging to the faith community. The Sacrament is called ‘Confirmation’ because the faith first given us in Baptism is now confirmed and made strong through the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit.

In the early days of the church when people wanted to join the Christian community, they were required to take time to learn about Jesus. They learned to pray and they worked with the community, sharing their resources and time with the poor and those in need. They were welcomed at the Easter Vigil (the biggest day of the Church year!) where they were first baptised, and then anointed with oil. This anointing ‘confirmed’ or sealed their Baptism. Today, when candidates celebrate Confirmation, they are also confirming, or saying ‘yes’ to their Baptism.

As in all Sacraments – God calls and invites, and we respond. Our being open says ‘yes’ to God’s invitation to a deeper relationship. Our ‘yes’ doesn’t imply worthiness or adult commitment, but rather, that we want to be strengthened by God. The Sacrament of Confirmation is our very own Pentecost experience and all we need to do is to say...

‘YES!’





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B. THE SPIRIT OF GOD

As disciples of Jesus, God's Spirit guides us.

On the night before he died Jesus made a promise to his disciples: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth.... You know the Spirit who abides with you and who will be in you.... The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn. 14:16-17, 26).

How is the Spirit active and alive in us? How do we discern between the Spirit's prompting and ideas that come from a more selfish place. St. Ignatius of Loyola (founder of the Jesuits one of whom is now Pope Francis!) developed a set of guidelines to help us identify thoughts, feelings, and movements in our lives that lead us closer to, rather than further away from, our God.

Ignatius taught that if we are generally good persons at heart, then **positive experiences come from the Holy Spirit** as God calls us to draw nearer. The Spirit of God brings feelings of peace, strength, courage, consolation, and encouragement even in difficult situations. The right way is not always the easy way, but it is the way that finds the Spirit's peace, strength, etc. Following Jesus can be challenging just as loving those close to us is not always easy. But when it is hard to do what is right, when we are confused or in pain, that is when the Holy Spirit brings peace and strength at our deepest level.

Names and Saints

Catholics traditionally honour saints – those who we (the Church) regard as special role models for us in our call to follow Christ. Giving a child a saint's name in baptism is an ancient practise — a way of offering your child a model in how to live the gospel. At Confirmation, if a child already has a Saint's 'Christian' (first) name, then ideally that is the name by which they will be Confirmed. If not, or if another specific saint's example appeals to the child, a new Confirmation name can be chosen.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Holy Catholic Church,
the communion of Saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.

The Apostles' Creed

The Communion of Saints

In our Creed we proclaim our belief in the communion of Saints, but we sometimes forget that we are part of that communion! It includes us alive on earth today, those who have died and are with God, and those in purgatory (on their way to God). The connection between us all reaches beyond death and our prayers for loved ones who have died can benefit them. Equally, they can intercede for us with God!

Us – Saints?!

Maybe not 'officially declared' Saints, but, as part of the communion of saints, absolutely! If we think only of saints as living in a distant time and place and doing super holy things, we risk letting ourselves off the hook in terms of developing holiness in our own lives. The truth is, we are all called to be saints in the particular time and circumstances in which we live. Holiness will look a little different for each of us depending on who we are, where we are and what we are doing with our lives. But don't underestimate who you are as a child of God! We are called to be more and more Christ-like in our everyday lives, in whatever situation we find ourselves. Being holy isn't about spending one's life on one's knees but, rather, it is about being in touch with God (prayer) and living for others. Holiness is being the very best version of the person God made us to be—right here, right now.

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

WISDOM

To consider all perspectives – to see and understand the big picture. Recognises that everything is part of God’s love. A gift that takes time.

UNDERSTANDING

To read another person’s heart; to feel the feelings of others; to selflessly put others first. Allows Jesus (the Word of God) room in our lives.

KNOWLEDGE

To truly know is to weigh up what is important. Considers all factors objectively and clearly. Makes us aware of the world and our place in it.

COURAGE or FORTITUDE

To follow our convictions and conscience no matter what the cost. Courage is the strength to do what is right despite the challenges.

COUNSEL or RIGHT JUDGMENT

To help with making good calls in life decisions. Openness to another’s insight and the ability to sensitively offer insight when sought.

PIETY or REVERENCE

To appreciate God and be grateful for all God is and does. The gift of respect and love that follows – toward God, humankind and all of creation.

WONDER and AWE

To marvel at how wonderful our God is. To be amazed by God’s constant presence in our lives, the beauty of God’s creation and love for each of us.



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C. BEING CATHOLIC

Our preparation for receiving the Sacraments emphasises our 'being Catholic'. But what does this really mean? What marks out someone of Catholic Christian faith? Here are some starters...

To be *Catholic* is:

- ...to follow **Jesus Christ**;
- ...to come to know through Jesus, our **all-loving God** (Creator, Father, Mother...) and the **God's Spirit** (the Holy Spirit, Spirit of JC, the Advocate, Sophia, Paraclete...) – the three who together are the Trinity;
- ...live our Christian faith by taking **active part** in the community of people who make up the Catholic Church;
- ...be **connected** to Catholic tradition and practice;
- ...**value everyone** as equal and precious regardless of gender, age, colour, sexuality, health or faith;
- ...see our connection **with God** as that which connects us to **ourselves** and to **others**;
- ...live **authentically** (i.e. with hope, mercy and love) as part of a world-wide family;
- ...strive to **support people** who are in need and vulnerable;
- ...**care for creation** – earth, flora and fauna;
- ...realise that we are all about **community** – 'us' rather than 'I'.



The Call -Joy Cowley

Jesus says, 'Come follow me.'

I say, 'Lord, you're calling the wrong person. I'm not the following type. It takes me all my time to stand on my own two feet.'

And he says, 'I love you.'

I say, 'Now, don't get me wrong, Lord. I do all I can within reason, but I can't afford to go overboard. I mean, I have to live in this world.'

And he says, 'I love you.'

I say, 'It's all very well to talk about love, but love is dangerous. It can get people crucified. At the best it can be misunderstood. If I go round telling people I love them, someone's going to lock me up.'

And he says, 'I love you.'

I say, 'The trouble is, I'm not ready. Come back in a few years when I've got my life sorted out. By then I should have something to offer you.'



And he says, 'I love you.'

I say, 'Lord, don't look at me like that. You're making it very difficult. All right, I'll spell it out. I'm a sinner. I'd let you down. I'd give my life to you and then try to take it back again. I'm weak, Lord.'

And he says, 'I love you.'

I say, You don't understand what I'm telling you. I'd deny you and betray you. There'd be times when I'd crucify you. And what would you think of me then?'

And he says, 'I love you.'





THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION

The celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation will take place during Mass and Cardinal John will usually be the main celebrant.

Presentation of the Candidates

After the reading of the Gospel the candidates will be presented to Cardinal John. Each candidate will be called by name and respond –

‘Cardinal John, I wish to be confirmed.’

After the Homily, the cardinal will invite the candidates to stand and to renew the promises their parents made for them when they were baptised.

They will respond together – ‘I do.’

The Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands by the Bishop represents the ancient biblical gesture by which the gift of the Holy Spirit is passed on.

The accompanying prayer asks God to pour out the Holy Spirit on the candidates (and all of us!) to strengthen them with the gifts of the Spirit and to anoint them to be more like Christ.

‘...Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their Helper and Guide.

Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

The Spirit of right judgement and courage,

The spirit of knowledge and reverence,

Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence...’

The Anointing with Chrism

Ancient kings tattooed the hand of their soldiers with a sign or 'seal'. Referring to this practice, an ancient writer addressed new Christians as follows:

The soldier chosen for service receives on his hand the seal showing us what king he will serve. So with you. You were chosen for the king of heaven and will henceforth bear his seal.

Another ancient writer addressed new Christians with these words:

*Come near and receive the sacramental seal
so that you may be recognised by the Master.*

These examples help us to understand the words:

"Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."

They signify:

That the same Holy Spirit whom Jesus breathed into his disciples at Pentecost is now breathed into us, and

That the Holy Spirit's presence in us is the special sign or 'seal' that we belong to Jesus and have been called and empowered to witness to him and to continue his work.

Concluding Blessing – We are sent forth protected and empowered by the Spirit to be Good News to our world...

God made you his children by water and the Holy Spirit. May God bless you and watch over you with love. Amen

Jesus promised that the Spirit of Truth would be with the Church for ever. May God bless you and give you courage in professing the faith. Amen

The Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples and set their hearts on fire with love. May God bless you and keep you one in faith and love and bring you to the joy of the kingdom. Amen